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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [OSCE](#) [RU](#) [UK](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: SOVA: READY FOR NEXT STEPS AFTER VORONIN'S MEETING
WITH PUTIN

Classified By: Ambassador Michael D. Kirby for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Apparently, no major Transnistria (TN) initiatives flowed from the January 21-22 Putin-Voronin talks in Moscow. Minister Sova recently talked twice with Transnistrian "Foreign Minister" Litskai, who confidentially warned Sova that Smirnov or his inner circle may stage a provocation to take back central government-controlled villages near Dubasari. Litskai told Sova that he would welcome TN participation in working groups, but Smirnov had prohibited such cooperation. End Summary.

Russian Says No Transnistrian Breakthrough

¶2. (C) Russian Ambassador to Moldova Valeriy Kouzmin hosted an informal get-together at his home on January 23 to review the Putin-Voronin Moscow meetings. Invites included all of the 5 2 parties as well as the Belarussian, British, French and Hungarian Ambassadors. Kouzmin explained that we had no firm details of the Putin-Voronin meeting which took place as only four were in the meeting. (Yuri Zubakov for the Russians and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Andrei Stratan for the Moldovans were the only two who joined the presidents.) However, Kouzmin said he was certain that Putin gave Voronin no/no framework or document that would move a Transnistria settlement forward.

¶3. (C) During the dinner, Litskai and Sova spoke one-on-one. In addition, the 5 2 parties (Ukrainian Ambassador Serghiy Prizhkov, EU Special Representative Kalman Mizsei, OSCE Chief of Mission Philip Remler, Ambassador Kouzmin, Ambassador Kirby, Litskai and Sova) talked about the future of settlement talks. All agreed on the need to keep talks moving, building on the momentum started in Odessa in October ¶2007. While neither Litskai nor Sova thought that much would come immediately from talks -- be they formal or informal -- they would provide some assistance to any parallel talks. Remler took the task of calling the Finns (as OSCE Chairman) to move the date of the next 3 2 meeting from late April to mid-late February.

The West Would Not Guarantee MD's Neutrality

¶4. (C) On January 24, Ambassador Kirby met with Minister for Reintegration Sova to see if he knew more about the summit than did Kouzmin. Sova said he did not know the details of Voronin's private conversation with Putin, but pointed to the Kommersant newspaper article describing Moscow's position. Sova said his experience had shown that one should not underestimate Kommersant's accuracy. Russian Ambassador Kouzmin earlier had downplayed the Kommersant article.

¶5. (C) One of the Russian conditions for a TN settlement cited in the Kommersant article was an internationally

binding agreement signed by Russia, Ukraine, the EU and the U.S. to guarantee Moldova's permanent neutrality. The Ambassador explained to Sova that the 1955 Austrian State Treaty and the Zimbabwean Lancaster House Agreement provided international guarantees under various conditions, but that those conditions did not apply to Moldova. Moldova could undertake not to change certain constitutional provisions for a specified period, perhaps 10 or 15 years. Demilitarization and the creation of a gendarmerie might be a serious step towards reassuring Russia on neutrality. Regarding Russia's fear of possible Moldovan membership in NATO, the Ambassador noted that Moldova was not ready for NATO nor was NATO ready for Moldova. However, we would like Moldova to continue to contribute to international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions through NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

Litskai and Sova Discuss Possible Provocation,
Working Groups, Railroad

16. (C) In the last two weeks Sova met with Litskai twice under Russian aegis. Litskai shared with Sova his concern that Smirnov's actions were increasingly unpredictable as Smirnov feared losing power. Litskai alerted Sova that he feared TN security forces might try to take control of Chisinau-controlled villages in the security zone around Dubasari. Litskai told Sova that Smirnov's inner circle had been discussing such a plan to put pressure on Chisinau, suggesting that Russian peacekeeping forces in the security zone might permit such a move. Litskai planned to travel to Moscow this week to ascertain whether this idea was a local initiative or ordered by Moscow. According to Sova, Litskai said that Shevchuk also planned to visit Moscow soon. Litskai noted that he did not want any security provocations, and discussed with Sova ways to prevent such incidents.

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17. (C) Sova said he and Litskai had also discussed Voronin's proposal for working groups. Litskai said he would be willing to cooperate, but Smirnov had prohibited participation. Sova noted that the working group on demilitarization would require bringing together Moldovan and Transnistrian military experts, perhaps with the participation of Russian, European and American specialists.

18. (C) Sova told us that a third key issue he discussed with Litskai was TN's railroad initiative, which, Sova said, was structured such that Chisinau authorities could not accept it. Sova stated that Chisinau would not allow two separate railroad companies to exist in Moldova though the central government was willing to compromise on sharing railroad revenues and profits. He noted that during Kalman Mizsei's recent visit to Tiraspol, Shevchuk had also presented the same plan to reinstate railroad traffic to the EU.

Ukrainian Help on Transnistria is Key

19. (C) Sova suggested that Transnistria would be included on the agenda when Ukrainian President Yushchenko visits Moscow on February 23. Sova complained that the Ukrainians had been too passive on TN and were more interested in resolving other issues in Ukrainian-Moldovan relations. Sova insisted that these issues (property, border demarcation, a hydro-electric dam, railroads and Giurgiulesti port) be resolved as a package. The Ambassador agreed that by keeping them as a package it allowed Moldova to show flexibility. He also encouraged Sova to conclude a deal with Ukraine to (1) show that Moldova could have good relations with at least one neighbor and (2) so that Ukraine might become more disposed to taking a more dynamic and constructive role in the TN settlement process.

Comment

¶10. (C) Only Voronin knows the contents of his closed-door meeting with Putin. The Ambassador is seeking a meeting with Voronin to discuss the meeting. Chisinau is buzzing with speculation about Russia's current position on TN settlement.

Litskai's comments to Sova indicate surprising frankness and willingness to criticize Smirnov directly to the Chisinau side. Litskai's willingness to have TN participate in working groups and discussions of demilitarization suggest that Smirnov is the main obstacle to confidence-building talks. The unanswered questions are, to what extent does Smirnov represent Moscow's position and what interests in Moscow does he represent. We should capitalize on the momentum generated by Finnish FM Kanerva's January visit to have the OSCE call for 3 2 talks in mid-February and 5 2 meetings soon thereafter.

KIRBY